

CMST 23930/1: DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION I

Cross-listings: (CMST 33930 HMRT 25106 ARTV 33930 ARTV 23930 HMRT 35106 MAAD 23930 CHST 23930)

Autumn 2023, W & F, 12:30AM–3:20PM, Logan Arts Center 014 & 003

Lecturer: Marco G. Ferrari, marcoferrari@uchicago.edu, 773-230-1106 (mobile)

Office--Classics 314A. Hours--by appointment (in-person or remote)

Course Assistant: Andrea Oranday, oranday@uchicago.edu

SYLLABUS

Course Description

Documentary Video Production focuses on the making of independent documentary video. Examples of various modes of documentary production will be screened and discussed. Issues embedded in the genre, such as the ethics, aesthetics, the politics of representation and the shifting lines between “the real” and “fiction” will be explored. Experimental approaches, story development, pre-production strategies, and production techniques will be our focus, in particular—research, relationships, the camera, interviews and sound recording, shooting in available light, working in crews, and post-production editing. For the final project students will work in crews and be expected to purchase a portable hard drive. A five-minute string-out will be screened at the end of the quarter. Students are strongly encouraged to take Documentary Production II to complete their group work.

Overview

An important part of the fabric of contemporary society is made up of the images we produce and receive every day. How these images affect us is tied to how and why we produce them. This production course is a way to facilitate the awareness of this interaction through fundamental technical exercises in listening, looking, and making—key pillars in documentary filmmaking.

The course will strive to answer: How do students perceive their relationship to the environment? How can that relationship be translated into a visual vocabulary? How can this vocabulary be refined, through the craft of writing, researching, filming, editing and presenting? Ultimately, how can the environment itself participate in facilitating the students’ creative expression?

Goals

1. To explore the creative process by being introduced to the fundamental techniques in pre-production, production and post-production using digital video.
2. Through historical/theoretical readings and viewings cultivate the ability to see the world cinematographically and find creative solutions to “capture” or “interpret” that vision.
3. To develop relational skills in working collectively through the modes of documentary production while realizing a final expression.
4. To be an attentive spectator and expand the skill of critiquing, reflecting sincerely and meaningfully on readings, discussions, screenings, and in peer review contexts.

Class Structure

- Discussions based off of assigned readings and viewings/in-class film screenings.
- Conceptual and technical demonstrations, lab work and in-class assignments.
- Studio time (planning and production)
- Presentation of works (critiques)

Canvas (course page), <https://courses.uchicago.edu>

The online course will follow the syllabus as much as possible. Since the schedule is subject to change please stay current to the canvas course page, as changes or additions will be made in that platform.

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Readings

All required readings are posted on **Canvas** along with auxiliary readings and points of reference that can help further understanding. The extra readings will generally be on technical aspects of production or to expand on theoretical topics discussed in class. Additional material may be distributed in class and uploaded onto the course home page. In the event of absence, the student is responsible for all new assignments and information given during class time.

Suggested Reference Readings:

- Rabiger, Michael. (numerous editions). *Directing the Documentary*. Abingdon, Oxon: Focal Press. (available as pdf on canvas)
- Murch, Walter. 2001. *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing*. 2Nd ed. Los Angeles, California: Silman-James Press. (available as pdf on canvas)
- Nichols, Bill. 2010. *Introduction to Documentary*. Second edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Nichols, Bill. 1991. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. (available as pdf on canvas)
- Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor, *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking: A Handbook for Making Documentary and Ethnographic Films and Videos*, University of California Press, 1997. (available as pdf on canvas)

Viewings

Each class will have a time where we will view screenings of works. A Viewing List (with links when possible) will be available on Canvas and updated on a weekly basis.

Projects

1. Sound—Sculpting Place. 2 min.
2. Cinematography—Forming a Subject 3-5 min.
3. Documentary Development—Group Project. (selects & 5-7 min. stringout). Will continue to be the group's focus for Doc. II/Winter Quarter (final film will be 15 min.)

Grading

The success of this course depends on the commitment of the students to engage creatively with theoretical and technical course matter. The student's openness and sensitivity towards fellow classmate's expression will allow for greater growth and exploration in the class as well. Evaluation of all student work will take into consideration the student's availability to experiment intellectually and creatively in a way that demonstrates a thoughtful consideration and creative interpretation of the themes and technical matter raised through course readings, screenings and class discussions. *Late Assignments will affect your grade.

- Class Participation (20%)
- Digital Journal—weekly reading notes, posted on Canvas (10%)
- Individual Project—1 (20%)
- Individual Project—2 (20%)
- Group project—Treatment draft: Proposal, Plan of work, Shot list (10%)
- Group project—Selects (10%)
- Group project—String out (10%)

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Written feedback is given throughout the quarter, and an individual meeting at the mid-way point of the semester will be arranged to go over the student's current status and any concerns.

A = Outstanding participation and attendance, asks questions and embraces the process, substantial growth is evident by the end of the quarter.

B = Above average participation and attendance, palpable growth is evident by the end of the quarter.

C = Average execution of assignments, participation and attendance, little or no growth is evident by the end of the quarter.

D = Well below average of the above.

F = Unsatisfactory work, participation, and attendance.

Attendance

This class does not meet remotely. Regular in-presence attendance is required. More than two absences in class will result in a full letter drop in the final grade. A quarter is a very short amount of time, missing one class can mean missing out on a major technical lesson, which can affect the quality of your projects. In the case of excused absences due to documented illness or family emergencies, please present a dean's note as soon as possible.

Out of Pocket Materials

Macintosh formatted external 500gb to 1tb hard drive. Available for purchase at the DML.

Classrooms

We will use room 014 (Film & Video Production Lab) as our base for class meetings and demonstrations. We will also use room 003 (Digital Media Lab & Classroom) just down the hall (near the Equipment Cage, where you check gear out) during class time for class editing sessions (15 Mac Pro student workstations). When not reserved for other classes you are free to edit in the DML or reserve editing suites. As group projects begin to develop there will also be the ability to use editing suites during class time.

Inhouse Equipment and Resources

- **Media Center**, <https://www.logancenter.uchicago.edu/resources/techandmedia>. Through the media center certain gear will be explored and available for your use on projects. As the course develops you will be introduced to gear and technical demonstrations. Throughout the quarter you'll get to know Ben Chandler, Assistant Director of the Media Center, who will assist in demonstrations, and the rest of the staff at the center as we begin to check gear out etc.

- **Access to the Media Center** (that's both gear and any spaces, including the edit suites and computer lab) will require a few steps. These are necessary for all users of the Media Center, even if you've been a frequent user in the past or are enrolled in a production course. We find that enough changes from year to year that a quick refresher keeps everyone up to date and makes sure that we're all on the same page. The steps to access are available on the class Canvas page.

- We will be using **Adobe Premier Pro** for editing projects. You will need to create an account to use the application, <https://www.adobe.com>. This does not give you the ability to edit off-site, for this you will have to go on a payment plan through adobe.

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SCHEDULE (subject to change)

WEEK 1: BEGINNING WITH SOUND

Wednesday, September 27

Introductions, course overview. Non-narrative film forms lecture. Project 1: Assignment given.

due 9/29

- Project 1: Proposal
- Reading: Bordwell, “Chapter 10: Documentary, Experimental, Animated Films”, pp. 338-370.
- Reading: Altman, “The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound”, pp.15–31.

Friday, September 29

Media Center online and in-person orientation. Non-narrative film forms lecture continue. Sound recording basics and beginning with Adobe Premier Pro. Project 1: Proposal review.

due 10/4

- Project 1: Record material
- Reading: Nichols, “Documentary Modes of Representation”, pp. 32-74.
- Reading: Astruc, “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera Stylo”, pp. 17-23.
- Krishnamurti, “I: “Man’s Search...” (pp. 1-12), of *Freedom from the Known*.
- Extra reading: De Antonio on “Pig”; Hegarty_Paul_Noise_Music_A_History_2007-chapter-1

WEEK 2: SOUND INTO IMAGE

Wednesday, October 4

Non-narrative film forms lecture. Discussions from readings. Project 1: begin to edit work, media management.

due 10/6

Project 1: Continue to edit and record material.

Friday, October 6

Project 1: Edit, export and presentation. Project 2: Assignment given.

due 10/11

- Project 2: Proposal
- Reading: Bordwell, “Chapter 5: The Shot-Cinematography”, pp. 162-217.
- Reading: Lopate, “In-Search of the Centaur: The Essay Film”, pp. 243-268.
- Reading: Krishnamurti, “II: “Learning About Ourselves...” (pp. 13-17) & “III: Consciousness...” (pp. 18-22), of *Freedom from the Known*.

WEEK 3: ELEMENTS OF CINEMATOGRAPHY

Wednesday, October 11

Camera and light lecture and lab. Non-narrative film forms lecture. Project 2: Proposal review.

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due 10/13

- Project 2: Initial recorded material or proposal revisions.
- Reading: Epstein, “Magnification”, “The Senses”, “Photogénie”.
- Reading: Rascaroli, “The-Essay-Film-problems-definitions-textual-commitments”, pp. 24-47.
- Extra reading: Dislocation Blues (2017) Sky Hopinka.

Friday, October 13

Camera and light lecture and lab continue. Project 2: bring in initial material, begin to organize and edit. Project 3: Group—Documentary assignment given.

due 10/18

- Project 2: Record material.
- Project 3: Ideas.
- Reading: Bordwell, “Chapter 2: The Significance of Film Form”, pp 54-71.
- Reading: 4-Juhasz, “Observing the Observers”, pp. 1-6.
- Krishnamurti, “IV: Pursuit of Pleasure...” (pp. 21-23) & “V: Self-concern...” (pp. 24-29), of *Freedom from the Known*.

WEEK 4: CINEMATOGRAPHY CON’T & DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH—IDEAS

Wednesday, October 18

Project 3: Ideas discussed. Project 2: edit review

due 10/20

- Project 2: final shots and edit.
- Reading: Deren, “Tempo and Tension the Movies as Medium”, pp. 144-150.
- Reading: Eisenstein, “Film Form: The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram”, pp. 28-44.

Friday, October 20

Discussion on readings. Project 2: final edits and presentation.

due 10/25

- Project 3: Proposals
- Reading: Rabiger, “Chap 05: Time, Development, Structure”, pp. 79-90.
- Reading: Espinosa, “For an Imperfect Cinema”, pp. 295-300.
- Krishnamurti, “VI: Violence-Anger...” (pp. 30-34) & “VII: Relationship...” (pp. 35-39), of *Freedom from the Known*.

WEEK 5: DOCUMENTARY PRE-PRODUCTION—PROJECT SELECTION, CREW FORMATIONS, TREATMENT, SHOOT SCHEDULE

Wednesday, October 25

Discussion on readings. Project 3: Proposals review, project selection, formation of crews.

due 10/27

Reading: Bunuel, “Cinema Instrument of Poetry”, pp. 66-69.

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Reading; Dorsky, “Devotional Cinema”, p. 1.

Friday, October 27

Project 3: Treatment and Shooting Schedule work.

due 11/1

- Project 3: Treatment and Shooting schedule.
- Reading: Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image”, pp. 9-16.
- Reading: Bordwell, “Chapter 4: The Shot; Mise-en-Scene”, pp. 112-154.
- Krishnamurti, “VIII: Freedom...” (pp. 40-42) & “IX: Time...” (pp. 43-46), of *Freedom of the Known*.
- Extra reading: Quinn & Temaner, “Cinematic Social Inquiry”, pp. 1-9.

WEEK 6: DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION—SHOOTS

Wednesday, November 1

Non-narrative film forms lecture. Treatment review. Camera & Sound—interviewing lab.

due 11/3

- Project 3: Preliminary shots, bring material to class.
- Reading: Deren, “Cinematography: Creative use of Reality”, pp. 150-167.

Friday, November 3

Discussion on readings. Project 3: Review material, media management & edit work. Camera & Sound—interviewing lab.

due 11/8

- Project 3: Record material
- Reading: Bordwell, “Chapter 6: The Relation to Shot to Shot Editing”, pp. 218-260.
- Reading: Vertov, “Kino Eye”, pp. 6-126.
- Krishnamurti, “X: Love” (pp. 47-51) & “XI: To Look and to Listen...” (pp. 52-55), of *Freedom from the Known*.

WEEK 7: DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION & POST—SHOOTS & EDITS

Wednesday, November 8

Non-narrative film forms lecture. Project 3: Review material & Edit work. Adobe Media Management lab.

due 11/10

- Project 3: Continue to shoot
- Reading: Murch, “Blink of an Eye” selected readings.
- Reading: Hito, “In Defense of the Poor Image”.

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Friday, November 10

Discussion on readings. Project 2: review revised work. Editing in suites--Project 3: Review material & Edit work.

due 11/15

- Reading: Hooks, “Art on My Mind: Visual Politics”, pp. 301-305.

- Krishnamurti, “XII: The Observer and the Observed” (pp. 56-58) & “XIII: What is Thinking?...” (pp. 59-61), of *Freedom from the Known*.

WEEK 8: DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION & POST—SELECTS, EDITING AND PICK UP SHOTS

Wednesday, November 15

Project 3: Editing in suites. Review selects.

due 11/18

- Project 3: Continue to shoot/edit

Friday, November 17

Project 3: Editing in suites. Review selects.

due 11/29

- Project 3: Record pickup shots, finalize stringouts and read critique guidelines

- Krishnamurti, “XIV: The Burdens of Yesterday...” (pp. 62-64), “XV: Experience...” (pp. 65-68) & “XVI: Total Revolution...” (pp. 69-72), of *Freedom from the Known*.

Thanksgiving Break 11/21-25

WEEK 9: CRITIQUES—DOCUMENTARY STRINGOUTS & PROJECT 2 REVISIONS

Wednesday, November 29

Critiques: Project 3—Screen stringouts & Project 2—revised edit

Friday, December 1

Critiques: Project 3—Screen stringouts & Project 2—revised edit

~FINE~